



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE  
WASHINGTON DC

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MEMORANDUM FOR MEMORANDUM FOR ALLMAJCOM/CV/A1

FROM: HQ USAF/A1  
1040 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington DC 20330-1040

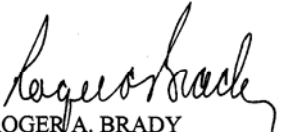
SUBJECT: PALACE HART (Helping Airmen Recover Together)

Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM (OEF/OIF) continue to present significant challenges and increased risks, particularly for those dedicated Airmen who support our current operations. The Air Force is committed to retaining these highly skilled, highly motivated, well-trained men and women on active duty if at all possible. If that is not feasible, we will ensure they receive world-class transition services via PALACE HART.

PALACE HART supports the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) initiative to ensure all ill/injured, medically separated members of the Department of Defense (DoD) receive complete information and entitlements due them by virtue of their service to this country. When an OEF/OIF ill/injured Airman enters the disability evaluation process, the Air Force Personnel Center Field Activities Division (AFPC/DPFF) will begin tracking the Airman for PALACE HART eligibility. If the Airman is medically separated as a result of OEF/OIF illness or injury, our Family Support Centers will provide world-class transition services which include individual pre-separation counseling and assistance in obtaining all authorized services from the AF, DoD, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Labor.

In addition, Airmen who were medically separated as a result of, or proximate to, illness or injuries in support of OEF/OIF will be eligible for special placement assistance via PALACE HART. Corporate funding is designated for up to 20 Full Time Equivalents managed through the Central Salary Account for PALACE HART placements to supplement local positions.

AFPC/DPFF will administer PALACE HART and provide case management and oversight. Any questions or comments should be directed to the POC, Mr. Bill Sherman, HQ AFPC/DPFF, DSN 665-2054.

  
ROGER A. BRADY  
Lieutenant General, USAF  
DCS, Manpower and Personnel

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PALACE HART CONOPS

# **Concept of Operations (CONOPS)**

## **United States Air Force PALACE HART (Helping Airmen Recover Together)**

February 2006  
**HQ AF/A1DF**

## **PALACE HART (HELPING AIRMEN RECOVER TOGETHER)**

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## **1. Introduction**

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) continue to demand much of the men and women of the Air Force (AF), the Guard and the Reserve. The AF will provide the same level of loyalty and commitment in the care of those combat-related ill/injured (wounded in action) as it does in preparing them for deployment and combat. When disabled as the result of combat-related wounds or injuries, these highly skilled, highly motivated, and highly trained men and women will be kept on active duty, if at all possible, and consistent with the Airman's preference. If it is not feasible for them to remain on active duty, the AF will ensure they receive extraordinary assistance via PALACE HART (Helping Airmen Recover Together).

## **2. Background Information**

a. In support of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) initiative to ensure all combat-related ill/injured, medically separated members of the Department of Defense (DoD) receive complete information and entitlements, the Components developed procedures to assist wounded veterans in transitioning back into the civilian sector. The AF program, PALACE HART, will include all Airmen medically separated with combat-related disability, including Purple Heart Recipients.

b. Combat-related disability is defined in Section 1413a of Title 10, USC, as:  
“...combat-related disability means a disability that is compensable under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and that...

- 1) is attributable to an injury for which the member was awarded the Purple Heart; or
- 2) was incurred (as determined under criteria prescribed by the Secretary of Defense)
  - (a) as a direct result of armed conflict;
  - (b) while engaged in hazardous service;
  - (c) in the performance of duty under conditions simulating war; or
  - (d) through an instrumentality of war.”

c. The program provides for:

- 1) assignment of a Family Liaison Officer (FLO) through all phases of the process, as needed
- 2) retention of OEF/OIF disabled members on active duty, if possible
- 3) transition assistance services and extended follow-up for those who cannot be retained

- 4) extended five-year case management follow-up and tracking of the veteran and their immediate family
- 5) special civilian placement assistance for Purple Heart recipients and ill/injured who cannot be retained on active duty

### **3. Purpose and Philosophy**

a. The purpose of PALACE HART is to ensure our OEF/OIF Purple Heart recipients and ill/injured Airmen receive world-class personnel services support, extended transition assistance, civilian job search assistance, and five-year case management follow-up with the veteran and their immediate family members. Purple Heart recipients and combat-related ill/injured OEF/OIF Airman who are medically separated for conditions associated with OEF/OIF will also be eligible for special civilian placement assistance via PALACE HART.

b. The AF has a long history of taking care of its own. Just as we demand incredibly high levels of commitment, loyalty, and excellence from our Airmen, they should expect the same from us.

### **4. Assumptions**

- a. Highly individualized personnel support will be provided to these Total Force Airmen
- b. Purple Heart recipients and combat-related ill/injured members who are medically separated as a result of, or proximate to, illness or injuries in support of OEF/OIF will receive special placement assistance for Air Force civilian positions
- c. Members seeking employment in the civilian community will capitalize on the long established relationship between the Air Force Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the Department of Labor and the Department of Veterans' Affairs

### **5. Strategy**

a. The AF will utilize existing mechanisms to ensure all Purple Heart recipients and ill/injured AF, Reserve, and Guard veterans engaged in OEF/OIF are provided the very best support pending medical stabilization. Currently:

- 1) Families are notified of the Airman's casualty status and receive Per Diem information and assistance from HQ AFPC/DPFCS (Casualty Services Branch) in making travel arrangements
- 2) AF/ILV, Air Force Survivor Assistance Program (AFSAP), assists with assigning a Family Liaison Officer (FLO) to Airmen who are wounded in action and evacuated from the AOR as a result of those injuries. As the Airman transitions from one medical treatment facility to another, a new FLO is appointed. The FLO helps the Airman and their families address any needs, concerns, or questions that may arise

and coordinates with offices that can provide resolution to those issues. Once the Airman returns to their home unit, AFSAP turns over care to the unit commander who will designate a local FLO.

- 3) If the Airman is found to be medically unqualified for duty before returning to their home unit, AFSAP will help facilitate the warm hand-off to PALACE HART at an appropriate time (usually after the approval of the Medical Evaluation Board results).

b. When a Medical Evaluation Board refers an Airman to the Informal Physical Evaluation Board by, support and tracking will begin.

- 1) AFPC/DPFF begins tracking members once they are referred to an informal PEB. If an Airman is found to be unfit for duty and identified for separation/retirement, AFPC/DPFF will take over support for the member and family from AFSAP.
- 2) If the Airman elects Air Force civilian employment under PALACE HART, a base-level Case Management Team (CMT) made up of the MSS/CC and representatives from family support and civilian personnel will facilitate employment. The base-level CMT will coordinate civilian employment with AFPC Civilian Field Operations.

c. AFPC/DPFF will coordinate base-level follow-on support for the member and family.

- 1) A Family Support Center Community Readiness Consultant is designated as the POC to the Airman and family for addressing needs, concerns.
- 2) HQ AFPC/DPFF, Field Activities Division, will provide operational guidance to the CMT.

## **6. Duties and Responsibilities**

a. The Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, AF/A1, will designate the Force Sustainment Division, Directorate of Airmen Development and Sustainment (AF/A1DF) as the AF office providing policy oversight and guidance for this program. The A1DF will provide regulatory policy, strategic direction and corporate leadership for PALACE HART, establish performance standards, and evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

b. The Commander, Air Force Personnel Center will provide overall operational oversight, guidance and ensure sufficient resources are assigned to execute this program

c. The Chief, Field Activities Division, AFPC/DPFF, will:

- 1) Identify annual resource and funding requirements for the program
- 2) Evaluate the program and provide required reports to higher headquarters and others, as appropriate

- 3) Identify the responsible Mission Support Squadron Commander for each CMT
  - 4) Develop implementation plan
- d. The Chief, Airman, Family, and Community Operations Branch, AFPC/DPFFF, will:
- 1) Develop and provide operational guidance to installation FSC personnel
  - 2) Identify installation FSC point of contact for each CMT
  - 3) Monitor the overall execution of the program
  - 4) Consult with the CMT on issue resolution
  - 5) Keep the installation FSC leadership advised about policies and procedures affecting OEF/OIF Airmen and PALACE HART policies
  - 6) Maintain related data tracking and reporting capabilities
  - 7) Track PALACE HART Airmen for 5 years
- e. The Chief, Civilian Field Operations Branch, AFPC/DPFFC, will:
- 1) Develop and provide operational guidance to installation Civilian Personnel Offices (CPO)
  - 2) Identify installation CPO point of contact for each CMT
  - 3) Consult with CMT on civilian personnel employment issues
  - 4) Keep the installation CPO leadership advised about policies and procedures affecting civilian personnel placements of PALACE HART veterans
  - 5) Maintain related data tracking and reporting capabilities
  - 6) Track PALACE HART placements until permanent tenure is achieved or employee voluntarily separates from AF PALACE HART

## **7. Appointment Authorities**

a. The availability of special hiring authorities for veterans is codified in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). These special hiring authorities allow non-competitive appointments for veterans and can be used for PALACE HART placement actions.

- 1) Veterans Recruitment Appointment (VRA) Authority (5 CFR 213.302): The VRA is an excepted appointment to a position that is otherwise in the competitive service.

After 2 years of satisfactory service, the veteran is converted to a career-conditional appointment in the competitive service.

- 2) 30 Percent or More Disabled Veterans (5 CFR 316.302, 5 CFR 316.402, and 5 CFR 315.707): Eligible veterans may be given a temporary or term appointment to any position for which qualified (there is no grade limitation). After demonstrating satisfactory performance, the veteran may be converted at any time to a career-conditional appointment.
- 3) Schedule A Hiring Authority for the “Severely Physically Handicapped”: 5CFR 213.3102(u): “Positions filled by severely physically handicapped persons who: (1) Under a temporary appointment have demonstrated their ability to perform the duties satisfactorily; or (2) have been certified by counselors of State vocational rehabilitation agencies or the Veterans Administration as likely to succeed in the performance of the duties. Upon completion of 2 years of satisfactory service under this authority, the employee may qualify for conversion to competitive status under the provisions of Executive Order 12125 and implementing regulations issued by the Office.”

b. Eligibility under these special authorities gives disabled veterans a very significant advantage over others seeking to enter the Federal service in that the veterans do not have to compete with them. An agency that wants to hire using one of these authorities can simply appoint the eligible veteran to any position for which qualified. These authorities also provide for noncompetitive conversion to the competitive service after a suitable period of satisfactory service.

## **8. Eligibility Criteria**

- a. Total Force Airmen placed in the Disability Evaluation System due to combat-related illness or injury sustained in OEF/OIF and Purple Heart Recipients are eligible for PALACE HART and the offer of Federal employment.
- b. Veterans of Operation Desert Storm will be included upon request as an exception to policy, with approval authority at the AFPC/DPF level

## **9. Performance Measure**

- a. Feedback from Airmen and their families on the support and services provided through PALACE HART is essential to measure the effectiveness of the program and to identify any shortcomings.
- b. Measures will be developed to obtain this data.
- c. AFPC Field Activities Division will provide data necessary to meet any reporting requirements.



## **10. Implementation Plan**

### **a. AFPC will:**

- 1) Develop operational guidance for FSC services for PALACE HART
- 2) Develop operational guidance for civilian employment services extended to PALACE HART eligible Airmen
- 3) Develop criteria and guidance for accessing implementation funding for up to 20 Central Salary Account authorizations
- 4) Ensure CMTs are established in the Washington, DC Metro area and in San Antonio, TX to provide outreach services, coordinate with other agencies, and maintain case management files
- 5) Identify, track, and report on PALACE HART Airmen via the Casualty Matters Division's (AFPC/DPFC) existing Casualty Morning Reports, AF Ill/Injured Support System, and other products as required
- 6) Develop any training guidance needed for the CMTs
- 7) Develop performance measures for the program

b. If additional Central Salary Account authorizations are required, AFPC/CC will identify those requirements to AF/DP.

# ***Headquarters U.S. Air Force***

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*Integrity - Service - Excellence*

## **PALACE HART**

**Helping Airmen Recover Together**



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## ***PALACE HART Goals***

- **Retain combat-wounded disabled members on active duty if at all feasible**
- **Ensure complete counseling on all benefits and services provided by DoD, Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Labor for medically separated Airmen**
- **Facilitate civilian employment with the Air Force when desired by Airman**
- **Ensure “Warm Hand-off” at various stages of recovery**
- **No differences in care for Guardsman and Reservists**
- **Case management for 5 years**



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## ***Family Liaison Officer (FLO)***

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- **Air Force Survivor Assistance Program appoints FLO to unifies efforts of all supporting agencies (IL, DP, FM, etc)**
- **Appointed on orders by installation/CC as short or long-term liaison to grieving family or WIA and their families**
  - **Must be an E-7 or higher; serves as advocate in helping families receive assistance, conduct business, address issues, etc**
  - **Examples: Invitational travel orders/extensions, shopping for \$250 entitlement of civilian clothing allowance, coordinating visits/presentation of Purple Hearts, etc**
- **Program a huge success; comfort level for families...FLO is not the expert; is guide to functional experts who render great support**
- **Unique to Air Force in terms of a unified approach that provides a *single point of contact* to assist with, “what the family needs”**



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# ***Survivor Assistance Support for Wounded Troops***

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- **WIA personnel contacted at least weekly**
  - **Keep tabs of recovery, FLO interaction, family needs and needs of the Airmen**
  - **Weekly report sent to IL, CSAF, CMSAF, and others**
    - **Lets senior leaders know how our troops are doing**
    - **Report used by SECAF office to assist TSgt Jamison with a join-spouse assignment for his Navy spouse**
- **Visit with Heroes is Scheduled Bi-weekly**
  - **Program set-up through CVA's office**
  - **Alternates visits by General Officers to wounded troops at Walter Reed and Bethesda**
  - **Troops appreciate visits from senior leaders**



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# ***Survivor Assistance Speakers Program***

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- **WIA Troops Volunteer to Speak of their experiences**
  - **Speak at the Senior Leaders Orientation Course**
    - **Valuable information for senior leaders and their spouses**
  - **Regular speakers at the Air Force Wing and Group Commanders' Courses**
    - **Frank talk of the the WIA experience**
    - **Discuss treatment of their families and themselves**
    - **Helps prepare commanders to care for WIA members**
- **Spouses of deceased active duty members also speak at the courses**



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## ***Medical Evaluation Board***

- **Referral by Medical Evaluation Board to Informal Physical Evaluation Board triggers PALACE HART and a warm hand-off from the FLO**
- **Case Management Team established for Airman during this process**
  - **Mission Support Commander, Family Support, Civilian Personnel**
  - **Facilitate federal employment if member desires**



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# ***AFPC Field Activities Division Randolph AFB Texas***

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- Ensures transition counseling given to members leaving the service
- Members are referred to and made aware of services/benefits provided by:
  - Veterans' Administration
  - Department of Labor
  - PALACE HART (Helping Airman Recover Together)
  - Family Support Centers
  - Air Force OneSource
  - Military Severely Injured Joint Support Center
  - AFPC Field Activities Division Toll-Free Number





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## ***Continuous Follow-up***

- **AFPC Field Activities Division follows progress and reports on PALACE HART separatees for five years**
  - **Advocates for services and acts on their behalf when appropriate**
  - **Coordinates with closest Family Support Center for assistance**